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# THE MENACE OF A PREMATURE PEACE

*AN ADDRESS*

BY

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT

FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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LEAGUE TO ENFORCE PEACE

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# THE MENACE OF A PREMATURE PEACE

By William Howard Taft

WE are engaged in the greatest war of history to secure permanent world peace. We are fighting for a definite purpose, and that is the defeat of German militarism. If the Prussian military caste retains its power to control the military and foreign policy of Germany after the war, peace will not be permanent, and war will begin again when the chauvinistic advisers of the Hohenzollern dynasty deem a conquest and victory possible.

Our Allies have made a stupendous effort and have strained their utmost capacity. Unready for the war, they have concentrated their energy in preparation. In this important respect they have defeated the plan of Germany "in shining armor" to crush her enemies in their unreadiness.

But the war has not been won. Peace now, even though it be made on the basis of the restoration of the *status quo,* "without indemnities and without annexations," would be a failure to achieve the great purpose for which the Allies have made heartrending sacrifice. Armaments would continue for the next war, and this war would have been fought in vain. The millions of lives lost and the hundreds of billions' worth of the product of men's labor, would be wasted.

He who proposes peace now, therefore, either does not see the stake for which the Allies are fighting, or wishes the German military autocracy still to control the destinies of all of us as to peace or war. Those who favor permanent world peace must oppose with might and main the proposals for peace at this juncture in the war, whether made in socialistic councils, in pro-German conferences or by Pope Benedict. That the Pontiff of the greatest Christian Church should wish to bring to an end a war in which millions of its communion are on both sides is to be expected. That he should preserve a difficult neutrality is also natural. That his high purpose is to save the world from further suffering goes without saying. But the present is not the opportunity of an intervening peacemaker who must assume that compromise is possible.

**NO TIME FOR COMPROMISE**

The Allies are fighting for a principle the maintenance of which affects the future of civilization. If they do not achieve it they have sacrificed the flower of their youth and mortgaged their future for a century, and all for nothing. This is not a war in which the stake is territory or the sphere of influence of one nation over another. The Allies cannot concede peace until they conquer it. When they do so, it will be permanent. Otherwise they fail.

There are wars like that between Japan and Russia, in which President Roosevelt properly and successfully intervened to bring about a peace that helped the parties to a settlement. The principle at stake and the power and territory were of such a character that a settlement might be made substantially permanent. But the present issue is like that in our Civil War, which was whether the Union was to be preserved and the cancer of slavery was to be cut out. Peace proposals to President Lincoln were quite as numerous as those of to-day, and were moved by quite as high motives. But there was no compromise possible. Either slavery and disunion lost or won. So to-day the great moral object of the war must be achieved or defeated.

**THE LEAGUE TO ENFORCE PEACE**

An organization of citizens in the United States, known as the League to Enforce Peace, has been active for three years past in promoting its propaganda. There is a similar association in England. In that League are many persons who for years urged the settlement of all international controversies by arbitration or judicial decision. The vortex of death and destruction for the peoples of the world, which the breaking out of the war portended, roused these peace lovers and promoters to devise a plan for avoiding war after this should end.

The plan is a simple one. It looks to a league of all nations in which all agree, first, that legal international controversies shall be heard and decided by a Court; second, that controversies not to be settled on principles of law shall be submitted to a Commission of Conciliation for recommendation of a settlement; third, that the united forces of the nations of the League shall resist any nation beginning war before the quarrel has been submitted to one tribunal or the other, and been decided. The American League has not thought it wise to attempt to enforce the judgment or the settlement recommended. Its scheme is only to restrain the contending parties from resorting to war until after the peaceable procedure has been had and the decision rendered. The promoters of the League believe that the delay and deliberation arising from this enforced

peaceable procedure before a war can be begun will prevent most wars, and that it is wiser not to attempt too much, lest the nations decline to restrain their freedom of action so much. The English plan is more ambitious in providing that if the council of nations so decide they must enforce the judgment or settlement.

Whatever the detailed stipulations of such a league, however, its operation and success must depend on the obligations of the treaty stipulations. Unless their binding effect is recognized by the nations as a sacred principle, the stipulations of the league will be "writ in water." The revelations and disclosures of this war will satisfy the members of the league that as long as the present military caste controls the German military and foreign policy, the league is impracticable, and would not be worth the parchment on which its obligations would be recorded. Why have they reached this conclusion? Why, as citizens of the United States, and as citizens of the world anxious to promote peace, do they feel that any proposal of peace in the present situation would defeat permanent world peace, and should be opposed by them with all the energy they can command? The answer to this question must be found in the causes of this war and the revelations it has made of Germany's purpose, stripped of confusing pretence and naked for the whole world to see.

Germany was long divided into little states, kingdoms, duchies and other forms of one-man rule. She was the prey of political intrigue and manipulation of other powers. All her well-wishers hoped for and looked forward to her union. The Germans of yore had loved freedom. We Anglo-Saxons were Germans once and our representative system can be traced back to institutions found first in the forests of Germany. In the wars of the first Napoleon, Prussia and other German states were subjected to a great humiliation. But the German youth rebelled, organized themselves into military reserves, and finally contributed much to the defeat of the man whose lust for universal power finds its counterpart in the aim of the Hohenzollerns of to-day. The Holy Alliance, retaining the principle of the divine right of kings, and supporting it in all of Germany, left no opportunity for the free exercise of political power by these liberty-loving German youth. In 1848 democratic revolutions occurred throughout Germany and in Austria, but they were overcome. Many of the leaders came to the United States and with their followers became our best adopted citizens. When our Civil War came on, their hatred of slavery led them to volunteer for their adopted country, and every battlefield of the war was wet with German blood.

**THE GERMAN MILITARISTIC POLICY**

In Germany itself, however, the liberal element was not allowed to work out its hopes. It had looked to a united and liberal Germany with a government based on the representative system. It was not to be. Under the first William with his Prime Minister Bismarck, who came to power in 1862, a definite plan was adopted of perfecting the already well-disciplined Prussian army so that by "blood and iron" the unity of Germany should be achieved. The whole Prussian nation was made into an army, and it soon became a machine with a power of conquest equaled by no other. The cynical, unscrupulous, but effective, diplomacy of Bismarck first united Prussia with Austria to deprive Denmark of Schleswig-Holstein by force, then secured a quarrel with Austria over the spoils, and deprived her of all influence over the German states by humiliating defeat in the six weeks' war of 1866. After this war, several German states were annexed forcibly to Prussia and offensive and defensive alliances were made with others.

Then in 1870 the occasion was seized, when it was known that France was not prepared, to strike at her. France was beaten, and Alsace and Lorraine were taken from her. The German Empire was established with a Prussian King at its head. France was made to pay an indemnity of one billion dollars, with which the military machine of Germany was strengthened and improved. Then Germany settled down to a period of peace to digest the territory which by these three wars had been absorbed. Bismarck's purpose in maintaining the superiority of his army was to retain what had been taken by blood and iron, and at the same time by a period of prolonged peace to give to Germany a full opportunity for industrial development and the self-discipline necessary for the highest efficiency.

The marvelous work which the Germans have accomplished in their field of industrial activity is known to all. The prosperity which followed increased the population of Germany and crowded her borders. Bismarck was dismissed by the present Emperor, but his policy of maintaining the highest efficiency of the army was continued. And then, as the success of the German system in the material development of the Empire showed itself and became the admiration of the world, the destiny of Germany grew larger in the eyes of her Emperor and her people, and the blood and iron policy which had been directed first to the achievement of the unity of Germany and then to the defense of the German Empire in the enjoyment of what had been taken in previous wars, expanded into a dream of Germanizing the world. The German people were impregnated with this idea by every method of official instruction. A cult of philosophy

to spread the propaganda developed itself in the universities and schools. The principle was that the state could do no wrong, that the state was an entity that must be sustained by force; that everything else must be sacrificed to its strength; that the only sin the state could commit was neglect and failure to maintain its power.

With that dogmatic logic which pleases the German mind, and to which it readily adapts itself, this proposition easily led into the further conclusion that there could be no international morality; that morality and its principles applied only to individuals, but that when the action of the state was involved, considerations of honor, of the preservation of obligations solemnly made, must yield if the interests of the state required. These were the principles taught by Treitschke in the University of Berlin and maintained by German economic philosophers, and by the representative of the military régime in Bernhardi.

**DER TAG!** Bismarck had been keen enough in his diplomacy to await the opportunity that events presented for seeming to be forced into a war which he had long planned. This was the case with Denmark. This was the case with Austria. This was the case with France. German diplomacy has lost nothing of this characteristic in the present war. Germany did not plan the killing of the Austrian Archduke and his consort, but the minute that that presented the likelihood of war, Germany accepted it as the opportunity for her to strike down her neighbors, Russia and France, and to enlarge her power. She gladly gave her consent to the ultimatum of Austria to Servia that was sure to bring on war, and then posed as one driven into war by the mobilization of Russia.

She knew that Russia was utterly unprepared. She knew that France was unprepared. She knew that Great Britain was unprepared. She herself was ready to the last cannon and the last reservist. Therefore, when appealed to by Great Britain and by all the other Powers to intervene and prevent Austria from forcing a universal war, Germany declined to act. Not a telegram or communication between Germany and Austria has ever been given to the public to show the slightest effort to induce delay by Austria. While Germany would pose as having acted only as Austria's ally and as unwilling to influence her against her interest and independent judgment, the verdict of history unquestionably will be that the war is due to Germany's failure to prevent it and to her desire to accept the opportunity of the assassination of the Austrian Archduke as a convenient time to begin a war she long intended. The revelation of their unpreparedness is sufficient to show that England, France and Russia did not conspire to bring the war on. On the other hand, before

the war began Germany had constructed a complete system of strategic railways on her Belgian border, adapted not to commercial uses, but only to the quick invasion of Belgium.

**A CLEAR CASE AGAINST GERMANY**

Indeed, every fact as the war has developed forms one more circumstance in the irrefragable case against Germany as the Power responsible for this world disaster. The preparation of fifty years, the false philosophy of her destiny and of the exaltation of force, had given her a yearning for conquest, for the expansion of her territory, the extension of her influence, and the Germanization of the world. She alone is responsible for the incalculable destruction of this war. She led on in the armament of the world that she might rule it. She promoted therefore the armament of other nations. Her system was followed, though not as effectively, by other countries in pure defense of their peace and safety.

And now her Emperor, her Prussian military caste, and her wonderful but blinded people, have the blood of the millions who have suffered in this world catastrophe on their hands. The German military doctrine, that when the interests of the state are concerned, the question is one of power and force, and not of honor or obligation or moral restraint, finds its most flagrant examples in Germany's conduct of this war.

Her breach of a solemn obligation entered into by her and all the powers of Europe, in respect to Belgium's neutrality, was its first exhibition. It was followed by the well-proven deliberate plan of atrocities against the men, women and children of a part of Belgium in order to terrorize the rest of the population into complete submission. It was shown in the prompt dropping of bombs on defenceless towns from Zeppelins and other aircraft; in the killing of non-combatant men, women and children by the naval bombardment of unfortified towns; in the use of liquid fire and poison gases in battle. All of these had been condemned as improper in declarations in the Hague treaties.

**GERMAN INTRIGUE**

The Reptile Fund, which was used under Bismarck for the bribery of the press and for the maintenance of a spy system, has been enlarged and elaborated, so that German bribery has extended the world over, and the German espionage has exceeded anything known to history. The medieval use by the Hohenzollerns of dynastic kinship has paralyzed the action of the peoples of Greece and Russia. And now we know by recent revelation, of the aid that Swedish diplomats are furnishing to Germany in her submarine

warfare against neutral ships, and that it is made possible by the influence of the German consort of the Swedish King.

Intrigue, dishonor, cruelty, have characterized the entire military policy of Germany. The rules of international law have been cast to the winds. The murderous submarine has sunk without warning the non-combatant commercial vessels of the enemy and sent their officers, their crews and their passengers, men, women and children, to the bottom without warning. Not only has this policy been pursued against enemy commercial vessels, but also against neutral commercial vessels, and parts of the crew have been assembled on the submarines and then the submarine has been submerged and the victims left struggling in the ocean's waste to drown. We find a German diplomat telegraphing from a neutral port to the German headquarters advising that if the submarine be used against the vessels of that neutral power it leave no trace of the attack. In other words, the murder of the crews must be complete, because "dead men tell no tales."

Having violated the neutrality of Belgium, having broken its sacred obligations to that country and her people, it is now enslaving them by taking them from Belgium and enforcing their labor in Germany. This is contrary to every rule of international law, and is in the teeth of the plainest principles of justice and honor. All these things are done for the state. It is not that the nature of the German people generally is cruel—that is not the case. But the minds of the German people have been poisoned with this false philosophy; and the ruling caste in Germany, in its desperate desire to win, has allowed no consideration of humanity or decency or honor to prevent its use of any means which in any way could by hook or crook accomplish a military purpose.

When the war began, Germany was able to convince her people and to convince many in the world that the issue in the war was not the exaltation of the military power of Germany and the expansion of her plan of destiny, but that it was a mere controversy between the Teuton and the Slav, and Germany asked with great plausibility, "Will you have the world controlled by the Slav or by the German?" Those who insisted that the issue was one of militarism against the peace of the world, of democracy against military autocracy, of freedom against military tyranny, were met with the argument: "Russia is an ally. She is a greater despotism and a greater military autocracy than Germany." As the war wore on, the real issue was cleared of this confusion. Russia became a democracy. The fight was between governments directed by their people on the one hand, and the military dynasties of Germany, Austria and Turkey, on the other.

**THE PURPOSE OF THE WAR**

President Wilson says the Allies are fighting to make the world safe for democracy. Some misconception has been created on this head. The Allies are not struggling to force a particular form of government on Germany. If the German people continue to wish an Emperor it is not the purpose of the Allies to require them to have a republic. Their purpose is to end the military policy and foreign policy of Germany that looks to the maintenance of a military and naval machine, with its hair-trigger preparation for use against her neighbors. If this continues, it will entail on every democratic government the duty of maintaining a similar armament in self-defense, or, what is more likely, the duty will be wholly or partly neglected. Thus the policy of Germany, with her purpose and destiny, will threaten every democracy. This is the condition which it is the determined purpose of the Allies, as interpreted by President Wilson, to change.

How is the change to be effected? By defeating Germany in this war. The German people have been very loyal to their Emperor, because his leadership accords with the false philosophy of the state and German destiny, with which they have been indoctrinated and poisoned. A defeat of the military machine, a defeat of the Frankenstein of the military dynasty to which they have been sacrificed, must open their eyes to the hideous futility of their political course. The German Government will then be changed as its people will have it changed, to avoid a recurrence of such a tragedy as they have deliberately prepared for themselves.

Men who see clearly the kind of peace which we must have, in order to be a real and lasting peace, can have no sympathy therefore with a patched-up peace, one made at a council table, the result of diplomatic chaffering and bargaining. Men who look forward to a League of the World to Enforce Peace in the future can have no patience with a compromise that leaves the promoting cause of the present awful war unaffected and unremoved. This war is now being fought by the Allies as a League to Enforce Peace. Unless they compel it by victory, they do not enforce it. They do not make the military autocracies of the world into nations fit for a World League, unless they convince them by a lesson of defeat.

**AMERICA'S PART**

When the war came on, there were a few in the United States who felt that the invasion of Belgium required a protest on the part of our government, and some indeed who felt that we should join in the war at once. But the great body of the American people, influenced by our traditional policy of avoiding European

quarrels, stood by the Administration in desiring to maintain a strict neutrality. I think it is not unfair to say that a very large proportion of the intelligent and thinking people of the United States—and that means a great majority—sympathized with the Allies in the struggle which they were making. But many with us of German descent, prompted by a pride in the notable advance in the world of German enterprise, German ingenuity, German discipline, German efficiency, and regarding the struggle as an issue between Teuton and Slav, extended their sympathy to their Fatherland.

As conscientiously as possible, the Administration and the country pursued the course laid down by international law as that which a neutral should take. International law is the rule of conduct of nations toward one another, accepted and acquiesced in by all nations. It is not always as definite as one would like, and the acquiescence of all nations is not always as clearly established as it ought to be. But in the law of war as to capture at sea of commercial vessels, the principles have been established clearly by the decision of prize courts of all nations, English, American, Prussian and French. The right of non-combatants on commercial vessels, officers, crew and passengers, either enemy or neutral, to be secure from danger of life, has always been recognized and never contested. Nevertheless, Germany sank, without warning, 150 American citizens, men, women and children, and sent them to their death by a submarine torpedo, simply because they happened to be on English or American commercial vessels. We protested and Germany halted for a time. We thought that if we condoned the death of 150 we might still maintain peace with that Power.

But it was not to be, and after more than a year Germany announced her purpose to resume this murderous and illegal course toward innocent Americans. Had we hesitated, we would have lost our independence as a people. We would have subscribed abjectly to the doctrine that might makes right. Germany left no door open to us as a self-respecting nation except that which led to war. She deliberately forced us into the ranks of her enemies, and she did it because she was obsessed with the belief that the submarine was the instrument of destruction by which she might win the war. She recked not that as she used it, it was a weapon of murder of innocents. Making military efficiency her god, and exalting the appliances of science in the killing of men, she ignored all other consequences.

Germany's use of the submarine brought us into the war. But being in, we recognized as fully as any of our Allies do that its far greater issue is whether German militarism shall continue after this war to be a

threat to the peace of the world, or whether we shall end that threat by this struggle in which we are to spend our life's blood. We must not therefore be turned from the stern necessity of winning this war.

**THE MORAL ISSUE**

When the war began and its horrible character was soon disclosed, there were many religious persons who found their faith in God shaken by the fact that millions of innocent persons could be headed into this vortex of blood and destruction without the saving intervention of their Creator. But the progress of the war has revealed much, and it has stimulated our just historic sense. It shows that the world had become, through the initiative of Germany and the following on of the other nations, afflicted with the cancer of militarism. God reveals the greatness of His power and His omnipotence not by fortuitous and sporadic intervention, but by the working out of His inexorable law. A cancer if it is not to consume the body must be cut out, and the cutting out of it necessarily involves suffering and pain in the body. The sacrifices of lives and treasure are inevitable in the working out of the cure of the world malady. But we must win the war to vindicate this view.

We are now able to see the providential punishment and weakness that follows the violation of moral law. The crass materialism of the German philosophy that exalts force above morality, power above honor and decency, success above humanity, has blinded the German ruling caste to the strength of moral motives that control other peoples, and involved them in the fundamental mistakes that will cause their downfall. They assumed that England, burdened with Ireland, would violate her own obligation and abandon Belgium and would leave her ally France to be deprived of all her colonial possessions. They assumed that France was decadent, permeated with socialism, and unable to make a contest in her state of unpreparedness. They assumed that England's colonies, attached only by the lightest tie, and entirely independent, if they chose to be, would not sacrifice themselves to help the mother land in her struggle. How false the German conclusion as to England's national conscience and fighting power, as to France's decadence and patriotic fervor and strength, and as to the filial loyalty of England's daughters!

**THE CRISIS OF THE WAR**

England and France since 1914 have been fighting the battle of the world and fighting for us of America. The war has drained their vitality, strained their credit, exhausted their man-power, subjected many of their non-combatants to suffering and destruction, and they have the war weariness which dulls

the earlier eager enthusiasm for the principles at stake. Now specious proposals for peace are likely to be most alluring to the faint-hearted, and most powerful in the hands of traitors.

The intervention of the United States, by her financial aid, has helped much; but her armies are needed and she, a republic unprepared, required time to prepare. The war is now to be determined by the active tenacity of purpose of the contestants. England showed that tenacity in the wars of Napoleon. Napoleon succumbed. General Grant, in his Memoirs, says that the battle is won not in the first day, but by the commander and the army that is ready, even after apparent defeat, to begin the next day. It is the side that has the nerve that will win. The intervention of the United States has strengthened that nerve in England, France and Italy. But delay and disappointment give full opportunity to the lethargic, the cowardly, the factious, to make the task of the patriot and the loyal men doubly heavy. This is the temper of the situation among our European allies.

With us at home the great body of our people are loyal and strong for the war. Of course a people, however intelligent, when very prosperous and comfortable, and not well advised as to the vital concern they have in the issue of a war across a wide ocean and thousands of miles away, it takes time to convince. But we have, for the first time in the history of our republic, begun a war right. We have begun with a conscription law which requires service from men of a certain age from every walk of life. It is democratic in principle, and yet it offers to the Government the means of selection so that those who shall be sent to the front may be best fitted to represent the nation there, and those best able to do the work in field and factory essential to our winning at the front, may be retained. We have adopted a merit system of selecting from the intelligent and educated youth of the country the company officers. The machinery of the draft naturally creaked some because it had to be so hastily constructed, but on the whole it has worked well. Those who devised it and have carried it through are entitled to great credit.

The lessons of the war are being learned and applied in our war equipment and in neutralizing, by new construction, the submarine destruction of commercial transports. Adequate measures for the raising of the money needed to finance the war and finance our Allies, have been carried through Congress. Food conservation is provided for. But of course it took time for a hundred million of peace lovers and non-militarists to get ready, however apt, however patriotic, however determined.

"It is dogged that does it." Stamp on all proposals of peace as ill advised or seditious, and then time will make for our certain victory.

While there has been pro-German sentiment in the United States, and while the paid emissaries of Germany have been busy trying to create as much opposition to the war as possible, and have found a number of weak dupes and unintelligent persons who don't understand the importance of the war, to aid them, our allies should know that the whole body of the American people will earnestly support the President and Congress in carrying out the measures which have been adopted by the United States to win this war.

**PEACE THAT WILL LAST**

When the war is won, the United States will wish to be heard and will have a right to be heard as to the terms of peace. The United States will insist on a just peace, not one of material conquest. It is a moral victory the world should win. I think I do not mistake the current of public sentiment throughout our entire country in saying that our people will favor an international agreement by which the peace brought about through such blood and suffering and destruction and enormous sacrifice shall be preserved by the joint power of the world. Whether the terms of the League to Enforce Peace as they are will be taken as a basis for agreement, or a modified form, something of the kind must be attempted.

Meantime, let us hope and pray that all the Allies will reject proposals for settlement and compromise of every nature; that they will adhere rigidly and religiously to the principle that until a victorious result gives security that the world shall not again be drenched in blood through the insanely selfish policy of a military caste ruling a deluded people intoxicated with material success and power, there will be no peace.

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